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## Literary Interventions and Texts in Transit in the Work of Kathrin Röggla

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Born in Salzburg, living in Berlin, Kathrin Röggla is a writer in transit. Röggla has held literary residencies across the globe in such diverse locations as New York, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kosovo, and she writes across genres, often reworking her pieces through different media. In her role as Vice President of the Berlin Academy of the Arts, Röggla is an active figure in the German literary scene and has often spoken about the close relation of social and literary critique. Distancing herself from what she views as naive tendencies in the modern German literary canon to enlighten and educate and, instead, identifying herself in a modern Austrian tradition of linguistic skepticism and satiric play whose ludic character offers alternative opportunities for political critique, Röggla particularly stresses the need to deal with issues of media and form in any discussion of art and politics.<sup>1</sup>

Of central concern throughout Röggla's oeuvre is contemporary late capitalist culture dominated by neoliberal models of work, transnational networks and media culture. It has frequently been suggested that her texts are populated by the 'flexible subjects' identified by sociologist Richard Sennett in his best-selling study *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), who are defined by their capacity to let go of the past, accept conflicting market demands and live

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Gaulhofer, 'Kathrin Röggla, "Enge der Heimat ist nichts für mich"', *Die Presse*, 20 October 2012 <[http://diepresse.com/home/leben/mensch/1303644/Kathrin-Roeggla\\_Enge-der-Heimat-ist-nichts-fuer-mich](http://diepresse.com/home/leben/mensch/1303644/Kathrin-Roeggla_Enge-der-Heimat-ist-nichts-fuer-mich)> [accessed 14 August 2018].

life constantly on the edge in the face of forces of fragmentation and dislocation.<sup>2</sup> Her acclaimed novel *wir schlafen nicht* (2004) focuses on the relentless world of management consultancy. Set at an international trade fair for communications and technology, the text is spoken by six sleep-deprived figures who embody the paranoid contradictions of the New Economy with its drives for unfaltering efficiency and performance.<sup>3</sup> In Rögglas recent writing, the world of diplomacy and NGOs has come to feature prominently, as the author's analyses of crisis capitalism and risk management explore the global reach of their business models and the often-counterproductive implications for third-world countries that purportedly benefit from international aid.

Rögglas considers the writer's responsibility to devise modes of intervention in her Zurich Poetry Lectures of autumn 2016, posing highly contemporary questions about possibilities for expression in a reflection on the inextricability of the fields of art and politics. Her second lecture closes with an explicit call for a text in transit:

[...] möglicherweise gilt es gerade heute, eine Zwischengeschichte zu entwerfen, eine Maulwurfsgeschichte, die mehrere Ausgänge hat, die vielleicht mehr fiction ist als story, die trotzdem ein Gängesystem freilegen könnte zu anderen Geschichten hin, vielleicht ein Gängesystem, das dieses unselige identitäre Spiel unterbricht, wie wir es derzeit in allen Medien erleben. Eine Geschichte möglicherweise zwischen den Stühlen des Dokumentarischen und des Fiktiven, des Mündlichen und des Schriftlichen, eine Geschichte die ein Dilemma zeigen könnte, denn das Dilemma ist die interessantere Handlungsverknötung als der Konflikt.

[perhaps what's really needed today is to devise an in-between-story, a mole's tale with several ways out, that's perhaps more fiction than story but which might still reveal a network of corridors that lead to other stories, perhaps a

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Eva Kormann, 'Jelineks Tochter und das Medienspiel. Zu Kathrin Rögglas *wir schlafen nicht*', in *Zwischen Inszenierung und Botschaft. Zur Literatur deutschsprachiger Autorinnen ab Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Ilse Nagelschmidt, Lea Müller-Dannhausen and Sandy Feldbacher (Berlin, 2006), pp. 229-245 (p. 236).

<sup>3</sup> Kathrin Rögglas, *wir schlafen nicht* (Frankfurt, 2006).

network able to disrupt this disastrous identitarian game that's currently playing out all across the media. Potentially a story caught between the documentary and the fictitious, the oral and the written, a story that could show a dilemma, for the dilemma is the more interesting plot entanglement than the conflict.]<sup>4</sup>

Röggla conceives of her desired artistic response in spatial terms as an underground network of tunnels with multiple access points and connections to other stories. In foregrounding movement, multiplicity and indeterminability, she insists on the potential of fiction to offer more complex alternatives to ideology and dialectical modes of resolution. In the context of 'Austria in Transit' and my concern with Röggla's structural critique of neoliberalism, this article will examine her conception of the 'in-between story' or – as I suggest – the 'text in transit' as a mode that goes beyond the portrayal of lone subjects in crisis to devise literary form for invisible transnational networks. As underlined in the introduction to this volume, the term 'transit' can be used to denote both motion and stasis, signaling a condition of precarity, of people and things at once in motion and stuck in limbo, often invisible in those geopolitical spaces through which they are forced to move.<sup>5</sup> The work of the Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato on the production of subjectivity under capitalism will be used to draw out the wider political and theoretical implications of Röggla's artistic concerns. To contextualize the project within her wider oeuvre, however, I will first consider Röggla's recent poetological reflections on problems of naming and representation in the contemporary era. Throughout her writing, the spectral presence of

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<sup>4</sup> Kathrin Röggla, 'Zürcher Poetikvorlesung II: Von Zwischenmenschen, Zeugen und wiedererkannten Helden' (2016) <<http://www.kathrin-roeggla.de/meta/zuerich-2016-2>> [accessed 14 August 2018].

<sup>5</sup> See Deniz Göktürk, 'Transit', in *Das Neue Deutschland. Von Migration und Vielfalt*, ed. by Özkan Ezli and Gisela Staupe (Constance, 2014), pp. 111-13.

Ingeborg Bachmann in whose work Rögglä identifies ‘Zwischengeschichten [...], Geschichten *entlang*, Geschichten *wohin*, Geschichten, die unterwegs sind’ [in-between-stories [...], stories *along*, stories *going somewhere*, stories that are on the move]<sup>6</sup> will be shown to offer an illuminating point of comparison. In particular, Bachmann’s 1971 short story ‘Simultan’ [‘Word for Word’, 1989] will facilitate my central interpretation of Rögglä’s *die unvermeidlichen* [the unavoidable, 2011] as a text in transit that unmasks the machinic workings of disembodied political systems through the voice of the simultaneous interpreter.<sup>7</sup>

In one of her most explicit reflections on humanitarian intervention, the provocative essay “‘besser wäre: keine” [“better: none at all”, 2008], Rögglä identifies the break-up of the Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s as factors which have triggered an exponential growth of crisis intervention and management initiatives in the European context. Through discussion of her own stays in former Soviet Republics, the essay calls attention to the neocolonial tendencies of nonstate actors who frequently implement corporate strategies in crisis regions, undermining on-the-ground collaborations in favour of aggressive market models and instating parallel international communities disconnected from local languages, customs and concerns. As is so often the case for Rögglä’s work, the essay draws on extensive research and evidence-gathering, yet transposes this material into obviously fictionalized form. Its title reworks the dismissal of humanitarian engagement articulated by a European aid-worker who spent five years in the Congo with a British NGO for emergency

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<sup>6</sup> Kathrin Rögglä, “‘Es wird nicht wieder vorkommen.” Rede über Ingeborg Bachmann’, Robert-Musil-Institut für Literaturforschung, 1 July 2016 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>7</sup> Kathrin Rögglä, ‘die unvermeidlichen’, in *besser wäre: keine. Essays und Theater* (Frankfurt a.M., 2013), pp. 333-82. Subsequent in-text references to this volume will use the abbreviation bwk.

medical relief in an interview with Rögglä: “‘Besser wäre keines”, hat er schon gleich zu Beginn unseres Gesprächs [...] über das humanitäre Engagement gesagt, polemisch für viele Ohren, und doch ist diese Position eine Meinung, die ich von vielen Professionellen zu hören bekam’ [Better none at all, he said at the very beginning of our conversation about humanitarian engagement,(...), polemical to many ears, but I heard this opinion from many professionals] (bwk 108). Rögglä outlines the NGO worker’s negative assessment of humanitarian intervention in her text, citing its long-term psychological impact in disincentivizing communities from infrastructural maintenance that would rule them out of World Bank funding programmes, the likely prolongation of crisis situations through the involvement of NGOs and their complex financial flows, as well as the fundamental inefficiency of allocating jobs and resources to European workers in developing countries. Rögglä’s critical travel commentaries are concerned to subvert genre expectations and challenge stereotypes by devising what Eva Kormann terms a ‘shaky’ speaking position.<sup>8</sup> In “‘besser wäre: keine””, Rögglä foregrounds issues of perspective by reproducing the vehemence of the aid-worker’s speech and his repeated claims to be speaking from a position of on-the-ground experience, which raise wider questions concerning the reliability of the reported objections. Towards its close, the essay thematizes the problem of polemics in art, which it suggests are unhelpful to a writer necessarily more concerned with entanglements than with making a single point. Research on questions of genre in Rögglä’s writing has highlighted its complex engagement with the shifting mediascapes and finanscapes that Arjun

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<sup>8</sup> Eva Kormann, ‘Wer spricht? Zur “wackeligen” Sprechposition bei Kathrin Rögglä’, in *Kathrin Rögglä*, ed. by Iuditha Balint, Tanja Nusser and Rolf Parr (Munich, 2017), pp. 124-142 (p. 125).

Appadurai suggests define our global cultural economy.<sup>9</sup> Tanja Nusser suggests that in their extensive employment of slogans and set-phrases, Röggl's writings mirror the shifting phenomena that they criticize, as well as reflecting the constant circulation of middle-men and consultants in the global economy. Her analysis concludes by identifying Röggl's diagnosis of the catastrophic loss – under Fordism – of a fixed place from which subjects might articulate a cosmopolitical ethics or politics.<sup>10</sup> The situation of impasse implicit in this interpretation, which could be seen to gesture nostalgically towards a pre-Fordist age, does not do justice, however, to the more radical politics of Röggl's textual practice, which resolutely engages with the indeterminability of our media era to reconceptualize subjectivity under neo-liberalism. In what follows, I set out from Christine Ivanovic's early assessment of Röggl as 'Medienspezialistin [...] nicht weil sie sich in so besonderer Weise alter wie neuer Medien bedient, sondern weil sie dem medialen Dazwischen [...] ihre Aufmerksamkeit zuwendet' [media specialist [...] not so much because she deals with old and new forms of media but because she turns her attention to the medial in-between].<sup>11</sup> My focus on Röggl's

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<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in *Theory Culture Society* 7 (1990), 259-310.

<sup>10</sup> Tanja Nusser, "'Realismus beginnt eigentlich immer, und das von allen Seiten, er ist eine permanente Aufforderung'" Über Kathrin Röggl's Texte', in *Neue Realismen in der Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Soren R. Fauth and Rolf Parr (Paderborn, 2016), pp. 213-225 (p. 224).

<sup>11</sup> Christine Ivanovic, 'Bewegliche Katastrophe, stagnierende Bilder. Mediale Verschiebungen in Kathrin Röggl's *really ground zero*', *Kultur und Gespenster*, 2 (2006), 108-117 (p. 109).

current poetological project to construct texts in transit is therefore to be situated within her ongoing engagement with phenomena in flux that – in recent years – has become explicitly related to the project to construct viable modes of literary intervention in the ‘real’ world.

The obligation to engage with neglected realms within contemporary culture forms Rögglä’s explicit subject in the third of her Saarbrücken Drama Lectures, ‘Blinde Flecken’ [Blind Spots], which she delivered in 2014. Rögglä formulates her dilemma as a contemporary theatre maker:

Als Kind der Postdramatik, das ich wohl zu 101 Prozent bin, schien mir das klassische Dramentheater als Tradition, als Anknüpfungspunkt nicht interessant, die Fabel, die Handlung, die Figuren mit ihrer Figurentreue, die Dialektik [...] Schnee von gestern. Vielleicht aber ist das ‘Theater ohne Drama’ auch etwas übergelaufen, brandig geworden in Zeiten der Krise? Vielleicht reicht es nicht aus, im Theater über Kommunikationsformen nachzudenken, über Arten des Sprechens? Der Konflikt und der gesellschaftliche Widerspruch drängen ja nach vorne, nach all den Jahren, in denen man ihn an die Ränder Europas erfolgreich outgesourct und so unsichtbar und scheinbar unerfahrbar gemacht hat. [...] Es gibt diese Welt da draußen, sie ist verdammt real und wir verdanken ihr sozusagen einige der angenehmsten und unangenehmsten Erfahrungen. Ich kann sie nicht so einfach wegnicken in Diskursen. Ich muss sie aufsuchen, mich auseinandersetzen. Das geht bei mir eben hin und her. Ästhetik muss etwas Vermischtes an sich haben, der reine Diskurs, die reine Theorie macht noch keinen Theaterabend. Sie bewegt sich an den begrifflichen Sollbruchstellen entlang. Das Fernrohr muss manchmal umgedreht werden.

[As a child of post-dramatic theatre, that - 101% - I surely am, I was never really interested in classical drama and didn’t relate to it, the story, the plot, the realistic characters, the dialectic [...] That’s all so passé. But perhaps ‘theatre without drama’ is also a bit outdated, gone stale in these times of crisis? Perhaps it’s not enough to think about forms of communication in the theatre, about modes of speaking? Forms of conflict and social antagonism are coming to the fore that – for years – we successfully outsourced to the margins of Europe and rendered so invisible and apparently imperceptible. [...] There’s a whole world out there; it’s damn real and responsible for some of our most pleasant and unpleasant experiences. I can’t simply tuck it away in forms of discourse. I need to look it out, engage with it. I really do feel torn. Art needs to have something mixed about it, and pure discourse, pure theory are no good for an evening at the theatre. Art is situated along conceptual breaking points. And sometimes our gaze needs to be reversed].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Katrin Rögglä, *Die falsche Frage. Theater, Politik und die Kunst, das Fürchten nicht zu verlernen* (Berlin, 2015), pp. 82-83.



The lines articulate an awareness of tension between the playwright's duty to intervene in the real world and the post-dramatic need to challenge dominant paradigms through ambivalent aesthetic modes that attend to overlooked aspects of experience. Röggl returns to the question of the ambivalent realm in-between and relates it to the problem of bearing witness in the second of her three Zurich Poetry Lectures, 'Von Zwischenmenschen, Zeugen und wiedererkannten Helden' [Of Inbetween-figures, Witnesses and Recognizable Heroes, 2016].<sup>13</sup> The lecture begins with extended reflection on the omnipresent first-person in contemporary self-marketing, social media and talk-show culture. Röggl underlines her unease at aesthetic and theatrical traditions of bearing witness in the first person and their implicit truth claims which generate essentialist subject positions: "Ich als Frau darf das sagen" ['as a woman, I have the right to say that'].<sup>14</sup> Making pointed reference to the current rise of the identitarian movement in Austria that – in May 2018 – saw charges brought against its leaders for hate speech and coercion,<sup>15</sup> Röggl reflects on the way in which the position and discourse of marginalization has increasingly been coopted by right-wing populism and its claims to be offended in its chauvinist sense of self by the left, emancipated women and intellectuals. She concludes that first-person testimony has been compromised in

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<sup>13</sup> 'Vielleicht ist das Problem der Zeugenschaft eine Schlüsselproblematik im Nachdenken über das literarische Erzählen überhaupt. Was ist sagbar? Was übersehe ich?' [Perhaps the problem of witnessing is key to any consideration of literary narration. What can be said? What am I missing?] Röggl, 'Zürcher Poetikvorlesung II'.

<sup>14</sup> Röggl, 'Zürcher Poetikvorlesung II'.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Strickland, 'Austria cracks down on far-right Identitarian Movement', 22 May 2018 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/austria-cracks-identitarian-movement-180517105634855.html>> [accessed 14 August 2018].

a culture of victimhood in which those who are genuinely oppressed slip through the cracks. This recognition of impasse provokes her reference to an unfinished prose text by Ingeborg Bachmann from the 1960s whose fragmentary character is said to enact its subject – the impossibility of invoking the victim:

Es ist nicht wahr, daß die Opfer mahnen, bezeugen, Zeugenschaft für etwas ablegen, das ist eine der furchtbarsten und gedankenlosesten, schwächsten Poetisierungen. Aber der Mensch, der nicht Opfer ist, ist im Zwielflicht, er ist zwielflichtige Existenz par excellence, auch der beinah zum Opfer gewordene geht mit seinen Irrtümern weiter, stiftet neue Irrtümer, er ist nicht ‘in der Wahrheit’, er ist nicht bevorzugt. Auf das Opfer darf keiner sich berufen. Es ist Mißbrauch. Kein Land und keine Gruppe, keine Idee, darf sich auf ihre Tote berufen.

[It is not true that the victims send a warning, bear witness, pay testimony to something, that’s one of the worst and most weak and thoughtless poeticizations. But the person who isn’t a victim is in a twilight zone, he leads a twilight existence par excellence, also anyone who almost became a victim carries on with his mistakes, makes new mistakes, he is not “in the light”, he is not one of the chosen ones. No-one should invoke the victim. It is abuse. No country and no group, no idea should invoke their dead. But the difficulty of expressing that!]<sup>16</sup>

In Röggl’s view, Bachmann offers prescient commentary on contemporary media tendencies to fixate on and instrumentalize victims, as well as to impose absolute distinctions and hierarchies between them, which she condemns as a sign of barbarism. In a lecture on Bachmann delivered in July 2016, Röggl diagnoses the impossible position of real victims in media-dominated culture. Refugees fleeing war-torn countries are caught in a juridical and representational blind-spot between incompatible drives that demand the staging of vulnerability on the one hand and rounded, credible subjects on the other:

Genauso wie die Überlebenden des 11. September für das Fernsehstudio optisch hergerichtet werden mussten, müssen die Kriegsflüchtlinge als Opfer quasi maskiert werden, damit sie ihr durch die Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention verbrieftes Recht politisch durchsetzen können. Ja, es sieht so aus, als wäre das Opfer nur maskiert verständlich und erträglich. Gleichzeitig sollen die

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<sup>16</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, ‘<Auf das Opfer darf sich keiner berufen>’, *Kritische Schriften*, ed.

by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche (Munich, 2005), pp. 350-351 (p. 351).

gegenwärtigen Flüchtlinge für das humanistische Bedürfnis einer gewissen Schicht doch als ganze Menschen gelten, wie viele Portraitserien in den Zeitungen beweisen, d.h. als handlungsfähige, was wiederum im Widerspruch zum oben Gesagten steht. Handlungsfähige Opfer, wo gibt's denn sowas?

[Just as the survivors of 11 September had to be made up for the TV-studio, those fleeing war-zones essentially have to be disguised as victims in order to assert those rights assured to them by the Geneva Convention. Indeed, it would appear that only if victims appear in disguise, are they deemed worthy of understanding and toleration. At the same time, contemporary refugees are supposed to constitute whole individuals to fulfil the humanistic requirements of a particular social class, as evidenced by many portrait series in newspapers, that's to say as agents able to act, which in turn contradicts the above. Victims able to act – where on earth can you find something like that?]<sup>17</sup>

Röggla's reflections on this impasse lead her – like Bachmann – to reject a focus on the victim and instead to consider twilight, backroom figures whose contradictions offer a means for the writer to lay bare insidious systemic pressures. Röggla concludes her Zurich lecture by reflecting on the invisible agents of neoliberal modes of governance whom she identifies in those responsible for interpreting and taking minutes – 'Geisterfiguren, die nicht tatsächlich da sind und doch anwesend' [ghostly figures, who are not really there but still present somehow]<sup>18</sup> – in whose speech the collapse of inner and outer worlds becomes manifest. She underscores her aesthetic concern with the middle-men – termed 'ghosts and vampires' (bwk 117) – who do the bidding of their colonial masters as technicians, doctors and envoys. In order to explore further the literary and political implications of Röggla's engagement with these indeterminate, transit figures, I will examine the theatre text *die unvermeidlichen*, which premiered in Mannheim in 2011 under the direction of Marcus Lobbes and was published as part of the collection *besser wäre: keine* (2013). By reading *die unvermeidlichen* as a text in transit, I will suggest that Röggla goes beyond the flexible subject to use the world of the simultaneous interpreter as a means of depicting anonymous and unseen aspects of the

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<sup>17</sup> Röggla, "“Es wird nicht wieder vorkommen.”"

<sup>18</sup> Röggla, 'Zürcher Poetikvorlesung II'.

processes through which decisions are taken at political conferences and in private briefings. The spectre of Nadja, interpreter-protagonist of Ingeborg Bachmann's late story 'Simultan', will be understood to haunt Röggl's engagement with these in-between figures as the symptomatic voices of our media age.

*Die unvermeidlichen* was commissioned by the festival *Frankfurter Positionen* [Frankfurt Positions] for its 2011 season entitled 'Gemeinsam im Niemandsland – über die Zukunft sozialen Handelns' [Together in No-man's-land – on the Future of Social Action]. In its focus on the ambivalent voice of the simultaneous interpreter as solitary mediator, Röggl's text responds to the festival's stated aim to explore the relationship between individual and society during an age of extreme individualism, as well as to pose questions about the possibility of common social action through new networks and forms of participation.<sup>19</sup> The setting is an international conference hotel at an anonymous congress whose topic seems to have got lost in the barrage of crisis meetings:

die finanzkrisenkonferenz, die atomlagerkonferenz, die erneuerbaren energien, die migrationskonferenz, der klimawandel, die transitfrage, die defizitkonferenz, die sicherheitskonferenz, noch eine sicherheitskonferenz, eine weitere, eine bildungsnotstandskonferenz, eine zur pandemiewarnung, eine konferenz, bei der man nicht weiß, was sie soll.

[the financial crisis conference, the nuclear waste disposal conference, renewable energies, the migration conference, climate change, the transit question, the deficit conference, the security conference, another security conference, and another one, an education emergency conference, one to warn of pandemic, a conference where it isn't clear what it's even about] (bwk 341-42).

The text's six German-speaking figures are referred to throughout by the different nationalities for whom they interpret, indicating their status as surrogates for political actors who remain off-stage. The laconic opening stage direction lists: '*die alten dolmetscherhasen*:

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<sup>19</sup> Dietmar Dath, Dejan Dukovski, Chris Kondek and Kathrin Röggl, *Gemeinsam im Niemandsland: Frankfurter Positionen 2011* (Frankfurt, 2011).

*der engländer (herr miesigbauer), die französín (marie-claire), der franzose (herr kalender) [...] dazu die schrägeinsteiger: die russin (frau klein), der spanier sowie die neue: die chinesin'* [*the old hands: the englishman (mr miesigbauer, the frenchwoman (marie-claire), the frenchman (mr kalender) [...] as well as the inexperienced beginners: the russian (mrs klein), the spaniard, as well as the new girl, chinese*] (bwk 333). As in other works by Rögglä, these figures appear as types caught up in the contradictions of the economic and political jargon that determines their working lives.

In *die unvermeidlichen*, however, Rögglä's focus falls on the particular linguistic and corporeal implications of simultaneous translation for the interpreters, who must at once inhabit someone else's position and maintain the detachment necessary to complete their task. The basic premise can be seen to correspond to those prerequisites identified by Rögglä in her second Zürich lecture for a story in transit between the documentary and the fictional, the oral and the written. Rögglä has explained that she developed the piece following conversations with the documentary film-maker David Bernet about his work on *Die Flüsterer* [*The Whisperers*, 2005], a film set in the world of simultaneous interpreters, stressing the intensive research that went into her own project through extensive interviews with professional interpreters and visits to conferences.<sup>20</sup> The theatre text is structured in thirteen parts, which alternate sequentially between the confines of the soundproof booth and an unspecified outside space – 'draußen'. The shift between these two domains underlines the ongoing preoccupation with presence and non-presence in the piece, which is concerned with the interpreter's status as a liminal figure, at once caught up in the political decision-making process and at a significant remove from it. In the field of Translation Studies, the particular

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<sup>20</sup> Kathrin Rögglä, 'Die Schatten der politischen Repräsentation. Die Autorin Kathrin Rögglä im Gespräch mit Lena Schneider', *Theater der Zeit*, 2 (2011), p. 48.

status of ‘interpreters working in war zones’ as ‘invisible but important chroniclers’ has been discussed in comparable terms, tracing ‘the subtle, often invisible, but nevertheless extremely significant’ ways in which interpreters ‘contribute to elaborating the range of public narratives of the conflict that become available to us and, in so doing, influence the course of the war.’<sup>21</sup> In *die unvermeidlichen*, the liminal space inhabited by the interpreters is immediately foregrounded in the opening scene. In an audio recording by Bayerischer Rundfunk from 2012, the action begins with a buzz of recorded voices and technology that Rögglä terms the chorus, an innovation that might be read as her post-dramatic reimagining of the classical convention.<sup>22</sup> This prelude is followed by a series of short passages in which two interpreters comment on the linguistic demands of their profession in the very moment of simultaneous translation:

chor	gibt uns jemand mal ein briefing, was da eben los war? sagt uns jemand mal, was wir verpasst haben? wir steigen doch erst jetzt ein, und das würde uns unheimlich helfen. d.h. so ungebrieft können wir nicht arbeiten, da wissen wir gar nicht, wo wir ansetzen sollen, wie wir das verstehen sollen, also all die anspielungen, die indirektheiten, die bezugnahmen. [...] wer gibt uns jetzt die datensticks mit den reden, den powerpointpräsentationen? wer gibt uns die arbeitsmappen? und: welche redner sind in welcher reihenfolge dran?
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#### **1. kabine**

die französische	ich übersetze den delegierten aus paris. ich habe keine zeit, an einzelne worte zu denken, die übersetzung muss laufen, ich muss im flow bleiben ...
der engländer	ich übersetze den deutschen arbeitgebervertreter ...

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<sup>21</sup> See Mona Baker, ‘Interpreters and Translators in the War Zone’, *The Translator* (2010), 16:2, 197-222 (p. 201).

<sup>22</sup> Kathrin Rögglä, *die unvermeidlichen*, Bayerischer Rundfunk (2012)

<<http://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/inhalt/hoerspiel-und-medienkunst/hoerspiel-roeggla-unvermeidlichen100.html?time=188.170022>> [accessed 14 August 2018].

die französische	... ich darf mich nicht wundern über das Wort meckern, das ich eben gesagt habe – habe ich meckern gesagt?
[choir]	will someone give us a briefing on what just happened? will someone tell us what we missed? we're just getting started and that would be an incredible help. That's to say, we just can't work without a briefing, we don't have a clue where to begin, how are we supposed to understand it all, all those allusions, hints, references [...] who's going to give us the memory sticks with the speeches, the powerpoint presentations? who'll give us the dossiers? and in what order will the speakers speak?
<b>1. booth</b>	
the french woman	i'm translating the delegate from paris. i don't have any time to think about individual words, the translation must go on, i have to stay in the flow...
the english man	i'm translating the representative for german employers
	...
the french woman	... i can't think about the word whinge, I just said it – did I say whinge?] (bwk 333-34)

In these lines, the interpreters' statements find performative expression for the challenges of transposing someone else's words into another language, whilst simultaneously meeting expectations for their own speech to come across as natural and unforced. The opening mantra – 'the translation must go on, I have to stay in the flow' – offers commentary on the overwhelming pressure for the interpreters to conform to discursive forces that subsume them. Time pressures exert a particular toll: there is no opportunity to worry about individual words or slips, since the spoken translation must always go on. A sense of panic builds throughout as the figures are caught in a self-perpetuating chain of never-ending negotiations. In its penultimate section, a shared helplessness is given pointed articulation by the chorus: 'wir haben doch aufgehört, aber es geht weiter. also die sprachen machen einfach weiter. die nächste konferenz' [didn't we just stop, but it's still going on. the languages just keep going. the next conference] (bwk 375). Indeed, the structure of *die unvermeidlichen* builds towards almost total breakdown. At the end of the text the figures fade out into recorded voices and hooded spectral figures occupy the building, as the action reaches its apocalyptic climax.

In the text's exaggerated figuration of the interpreters as part of a self-perpetuating translation machine, I read the Deleuzian condition of machinic enslavement discussed by sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato in his 2014 study *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, which considers possibilities for rethinking established hierarchies between the human and non-human and undoing the industrial mass production of subjectivity. Noting that 'enslavement' is a term that Deleuze and Guattari borrow explicitly from cybernetics, Lazzarato understands 'machinic enslavement' as Deleuze and Guattari's original contribution to how capitalism works:

In machinic enslavement, the individual is no longer instituted as an 'individuated subject,' 'economic subject' [...], or citizen. He is instead considered a gear, a cog, a component part in the 'business' and 'financial system' assemblages [...] Enslavement is the mode of control and regulation ('government') of a technical or social machine such as a factory, business, or communications system. It replaces the 'human slavery' of ancient imperial systems [...] and is thus a mode of command, regulation, and government 'assisted' by technology and, as such, represents a feature specific to capitalism.<sup>23</sup>

Lazzarato identifies a dual regime of subjectivity under capitalism characterized by 'subjection – centred on the subjectivity of the human subject – and enslavement, involving a multiplicity of human and non-human subjectivities and proto-subjectivities.'<sup>24</sup> As Margaret Littler has highlighted, it is enslavement and its operation through de-subjection that have yet to receive sustained critical attention, particularly with respect to their political dimensions

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<sup>23</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. by Joshua David Jordan (Cambridge Massachusetts, 2014), p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 34.



and ‘focus on the immanent molecular potentialities of matter and machines.’<sup>25</sup> By understanding individuals and machines as open multiplicities which ‘operate on the same level and cannot be articulated as binary oppositions: subject/object, human/non-human, sentient/intelligible’,<sup>26</sup> Lazzarato suggests that the phenomenon of machinic enslavement contains within it a creative potential related to a dismantling of the individuated subject that – in the most positive scenario – might offer an alternative to the dominant contemporary condition of ‘paranoid, productivist, consumerist individualism’.<sup>27</sup> In her Saarbrücken lectures, Rögglä problematizes the current proliferation of sociological theories of the lone subject in terms with clear affinities to Lazzarato’s critique:

Der flexible Mensch von Sennett ist nicht mehr das cartesianische Subjekt von ehemals, die demokratischen Institutionen können ihn immer schlechter abbilden. Er ist ‘bowling alone’, wie der amerikanische Soziologe Robert Putnam das vor über zehn Jahren für die USA feststellte. Und dennoch leben wir immer noch in Zeiten, in denen Subjektkonzepte immer noch parallel nebeneinander bestehen, und so muss ich mich immer wieder von Neuem fragen, wie ich im Theater drauf reagieren kann

[Sennett’s flexible subject is no longer the Cartesian subject from long ago, and our democratic institutions increasingly struggle to represent it. The subject is ‘bowling alone’, as the American sociologist Robert Putnam found to be true for the USA more than a decade ago. And yet we live at a time when parallel conceptions of the subject continue to exist alongside one another and so I continually have to pose the question how I can react to that in the theatre].<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Littler, ‘Machinic Agency and the Powers of the False in Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn* (1998)’, *Oxford German Studies*, 45 (2016), 290-301 (pp. 293-95).

<sup>26</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘The Machine’, trans. by Mary O’Neill  
<<http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en/print>> [accessed 14 August 2018].

<sup>27</sup> Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Rögglä, *Die falsche Frage*, p. 61.

In light of this, I would suggest that the figuration of the interpreters' voices in *die unvermeidlichen* goes beyond sociological diagnoses of solitary man to develop a textual form concerned with the condition of machinic enslavement under late capitalism.

Lazzarato's 'dual regime of subjectivity' can already be identified in the opening stage directions which first introduce the individual interpreters before noting their collective status determined by workplace technologies:

*gemeinsam formieren sie den chor, wobei die chorstimmen aber (zunehmend oder immer) vom band kommen, sozusagen aus dem off, da sie sich mehr zu einer art gegenüber entwickeln. (warum? Der chor repräsentiert auch die technische apparatur, die kabinendolmetscher stets umgibt, sowie, man kann es sich denken, die trennung von stimme und körper.)*

*[together they form the chorus, although the choir voices (increasingly or continuously) come from the tape, off-camera so to speak, since they develop into more of a counterpart. (why? The choir also represents the technical apparatus that always surrounds interpreters working in booths, as well as – you might imagine – the separation of voice and body)]* (bwk 333).

The duality manifests itself in the technologically driven character of the collective, as well as in the acknowledgment of the cultural hierarchies that divide voice from body and, in so doing, replicate those binary systems that determine capitalist processes of subjection.

Something of this tension was highlighted in an early review by Peter Michalzik who suggests that director Lobbes 'inszeniert einerseits die abstrakte Sprachmelodie, den rauschenden Singsang, andererseits entdeckt er in den Stimmen Restbestände des Persönlichen' [stages abstract language melodies and resounding sing-song, on the one hand, and discovers remnants of the personal in the voices, on the other].<sup>29</sup> In conveying processes

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Michalzik, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11 February 2011

<[https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5227:die-unvermeidlichen-kathrin-roeggla-und-marcus-lobbes-zelebrieren-am-nationaltheater-](https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5227:die-unvermeidlichen-kathrin-roeggla-und-marcus-lobbes-zelebrieren-am-nationaltheater-)

of subjection, it is perhaps significant that the text does retain named characters and ascribed lines of dialogue, rather than doing away with these entirely as in recent post-dramatic works by, for example, Elfriede Jelinek. Röggl's named figures are not, however, properly individuated subjects and, in this doubling, Lazzarato's dual regime of subjectivity might be read. In the course of the action, workflow disruptions are recorded as instances of machinic malfunctioning:

der chor      *(verbessert sich)* sorry, ein dolmetschfehler – *(schaltet wie auf automatik um und gerät in eine schleife)* wir sprechen hier von der energieverorgung. wir sprechen hier von der restrukturierung des finanzmarktes. wir sprechen hier von ressourcen ... - sorry, dolmetschfehler ... *der chor verheddert sich in seiner eigenen akustischen technik und bricht ab* [(correcting itself) sorry, translation error – *(appears to switch to automatic and falls into a loop)* we're talking here about energy supply. we're talking here about restructuring the financial market. we're talking here about resources ... - sorry, translation error ... the choir gets tangled up in its own acoustic technologies and cuts out]. (bwk 360)

As true of Lazzarato's account of breakdown and malfunction in the context of the corporation, the immediate effort to return to automatic functions and enslavement procedures is similarly foregrounded in Röggl's text, where the machinic chorus assumes responsibility for ensuring timely completion of their work: 'hiergeblieben! weitermachen! wir machen unsere aufgabe ordentlich. wir machen sie bis zum schluss' [stay here! keep going! we'll carry out our task properly. we'll finish the job] (bwk 365). Increasingly, however, the collective effort to regulate and control is met with defiance by the individual interpreters who articulate frustration at the repetitive character of the relentless cycle of conferences and crisis summits. In her Saarbrücken Lectures, Röggl spoke of her desire to find 'Formen des Sprechens [...] die den Gewaltzusammenhang gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse deutlicher

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mannheim-die-babylonische-sprachverwirrung&catid=128&Itemid=90> [accessed 14 August 2018].

hervortreten lassen und gleichzeitig unterlaufen’ [forms of speech (...) that uncover and simultaneously undermine the violence determining social relations].<sup>30</sup> And, in *die unvermeidlichen*, it is precisely this concurrent project that can be identified in the exchanges which intersperse tongue-twisting political jargon with often-comic personal minutiae, as the theatre text deflates and unsettles the abstract political discourse and structures by which its figures are continually overwhelmed. In the opening section, for example, the comic reference to the interpreter’s mouth as the precarious vehicle of translation – ‘und ja er schafft es gerade noch’ [and, yes, it’ll just about manage] – both enacts and resists the shattering forces at work in this industry, as the resistant body leaves its material trace in the faltering voice of the translator. This defamiliarizing perspective serves to illuminate the machinic breakdown of the individuated human subject into an assemblage of parts.

Röggla has described *die unvermeidlichen* as ‘eine Komödie – aber eine unheimliche’ [a comedy – but an uncanny one].<sup>31</sup> She suggests that the comic moment – by pointing out the messiness of experience – casts light on the frameworks which determine our reality, a task she identifies as more urgent than ever for contemporary artists. The uncanny humour is closely bound up with the intermediary situation of the interpreters and the dramatic engagement with material dimensions of language spoken and sounded, in which the theatre text finds simultaneous possibilities for resistance:

Es sind mehr diese spezifische Beobachtungsposition und die Übersetzungstechnologie, jetzt im weitesten Sinn, von der Mikrofontechnik bis zur Stimmtechnik, die durch ihre Körperlichkeit Widerständigkeit bieten, aber auch die seltsam entrückte Perspektive – eben aufs Formale gerichtet – der Dolmetscher. Sie sind der Schatten, der den politischen Repräsentationen ebenso vorausgeht wie folgt.

[it’s really the interpreters’ specific position as observer and the whole technology of translation, in the broadest sense, from microphone to voice that

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<sup>30</sup> Röggla, *Die falsche Frage*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Röggla, ‘Die Schatten der politischen Repräsentation’.

– through their physicality - offer a means of resistance, as well as a displaced perspective and focus on questions of form. They are the shadow that both precedes and follows political representations].<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the action, the displaced reproduction of the voice in the mouth of the simultaneous interpreter forms a particular source of disruption, revealing the ‘dual regime’ or dilemma of the machinic assemblage as both enslaving and enabling:

der engländer	ich höre meinem kollegen zu, wie er manches zusammenschiebt, was nicht zusammengehört, wie er die bankenabgabe mit der emissionsabgabe vermischt, aber der satz ist noch nicht zu ende. der minister kann nicht aufhören und schachtelt nebensatz in nebensatz. baut ein satzungetüm, dessen ausgang ungewiss und ab einem gewissen punkt nicht mehr zu erwarten ist. [...] mein kollege hat einen hochroten kopf, er stottert jetzt, er schwitzt und rudert mit den armen, atmet gepresst ein und gepresst aus, er beginnt zu husten, drückt auf die räuspertaste, hustet noch mal, ich sehe die not, die er hat, sein körperfieber, aber ein ekel überkommt mich plötzlich, und ich halte es nicht mehr aus und stürze raus, auf der suche nach frischluft, nach abstand, lasse ihn zurück...
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[the english man	i listen to my colleague cobbling things together that don't go, mixing up banking deposits with emissions, before the sentence has even come to an end. the minister can't stop and piles sub-clause upon sub-clause, building one monster sentence, whose outcome is uncertain and, after a certain point, not even to be reckoned with [...] my colleague's face is bright red, he's stuttering now, sweating and flailing his arms, gasping for breath – in and out, he begins to cough, presses the microphone cut key, coughs again, i see the distress he's in, his feverish state, but a sense of disgust suddenly overwhelms me, and i can no longer stand it and have to break out in search of fresh air, of distance, leaving him behind]. <sup>33</sup>
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In these lines, the monstrous figuration of language as uncontrollable and unpredictable material excess, as well as the interpreters' frenzied efforts to accommodate the relentless

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<sup>32</sup> Röggl, 'Die Schatten der politischen Repräsentation', p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Röggl, *besser wäre: keine*, pp. 348-49.

translation machine, induce a state of emergency that causes the machinic assemblage to break down. This moment of uncanny excess associated with the machinic reproduction of the human voice has been considered by the theorist Mladen Dolar in reflections on the voice without a body and its haunting effect:

There is an uncanniness in the gap which enables a machine, by purely mechanical means, to produce something so uniquely human as voice and speech. It is as if the effect could emancipate itself from its mechanical origin, and start functioning as a surplus – indeed, as the ghost in the machine; as if there were an effect without a proper cause, an effect surpassing its explicable cause.<sup>34</sup>

In Röggl's theatre text, what Dolar here identifies as ghostly surplus seems bound up with its comic and disruptive voices, which inhabit the space between and refuse to be incorporated into any system. As Dolar further suggests, by enunciating the subject position in language, the voice is fundamentally associated with the very concept of the subject.<sup>35</sup> Throughout *die unvermeidlichen*, an unsteady of any singular, unified subject can be witnessed, as voices proliferate, falter, intercede and echo. Late on in the action, two of the interpreter figures remark pointedly: 'ja, es sind alles tote, die sich durch unsere stimmen durchbewegen. / sie brauchen uns um überhaupt zu erscheinen' [yes, they're all dead, those moving themselves through our voices / they need us to appear at all].<sup>36</sup> In this respect, their uncanny exchanges can be seen to lay bare a truth that Röggl – in an essay immediately preceding the theatre text in the same collection – suggests is especially true of Austrian literature of the twentieth century from Krauss to Jelinek '[d]ass Sprache uns nicht alleine gehört, dass sie sozial ist [...] Besonders sichtbar wird das in Zeiten der Krise oder des Umbruchs' [the fact that language does not belong to individuals alone, that it's something social [...]] This fact becomes

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<sup>34</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Röggl, *besser wäre: keine*, p. 372.

particularly apparent at times of crisis or social change].<sup>37</sup> Rögglä goes on to stress that the particular crisis of our contemporary age relates to a new understanding of subjectivity itself.<sup>38</sup> In order to specify her machinic reconceptualization of contemporary subjectivity in *die unvermeidlichen*, this article will close with a short comparative reflection on two further literary ghosts who haunt the piece, transiting through its voices and resisting assimilation.

With her choice of title, Rögglä makes hidden reference to the most famous engagement with the interpreter in modern Austrian – and arguably European – literature, Ingeborg Bachmann's 'Simultan', a text frequently acknowledged for its critique, *avant la lettre*, of globalization processes and their subjective implications.<sup>39</sup> In Rögglä's play, 'die unvermeidlichen' is said to be the nickname used for interpreters and security staff by those who take the conference minutes.<sup>40</sup> In the opening pages of Bachmann's 'Simultan', the descriptor 'unvermeidlich' is used twice in close succession to refer to Geneva and Paris as inevitable stations in the multilingual protagonist's professional life which plays out in the cosmopolitan world of international diplomacy.<sup>41</sup> Rögglä's title shifts the emphasis from

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<sup>37</sup> Kathrin Rögglä, 'Stottern und Stolpern. Strategien einer literarischen Gesprächsführung', *besser wäre: keine*, pp. 307-31 (p. 326).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>39</sup> See Erika Greber, 'Fremdkörper Fremdsprache. Ingeborg Bachmanns Erzählung *Simultan*', in *Werke von Ingeborg Bachmann*, ed. by Mathias Mayer (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 176-95 (p. 179).

<sup>40</sup> Rögglä, *besser wäre: keine*, p. 354.

<sup>41</sup> 'Die Städte wirbelten auf in der Nacht, Bangkok, London, Rio, Cannes, dann wieder Genf unvermeidlich, Paris auch unvermeidlich' [Cities swirled in the night: Bangkok, London, Rio, Cannes, then unavoidably back to Geneva and, unavoidably Paris, too]. Ingeborg

physical centres of political power to the highly mobile network of interpreter-agents, who form those ubiquitous nodes inevitably bound up in virtual processes of political decision-making. As well as the spectral influence of the iconic author, the ghost of Bachmann's protagonist Nadja can further be discerned in Röggl's machinic interpreter figures.

Constantly in transit between countries and languages, Nadja has been read as a prototype for Sennett's flexible subject<sup>42</sup> but – as in Röggl's text – Bachmann's prose finds more far-reaching articulation for a modern condition of enslavement. A romantic mini-break to the Calabrian coast with high-ranking UN official Ludwig Frankel forms the occasion for Nadja to consider the unrelenting demands of her professional role: 'es war dieses fanatisch genaue Zuhören, dieses totale sich Versenken in eine andere Stimme, und ein Schaltbrett war einfach zu bedienen aber ihr Kopf, just imagine, t'immagini!' <sup>43</sup> [you had to listen so carefully, fanatically, totally immersed in another voice. A switchboard was comparatively easy to operate, but her head, stell dir mal vor, t'immagini!]<sup>44</sup> Here, the multilingual prose finds performative expression for the psychic fracturing of the interpreter-protagonist as the semantically redundant repetition reflects what Giulia Radelli characterizes as a *déformation professionnelle*, where the reference to the switchboard triggers an automatic switch into other

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Bachmann, *Werke*, ed. by Christine Koschel, Inge von Weidenbaum and Clemens Münster, 4 vols (Munich, 1978), II, p. 286.

<sup>42</sup> Jost Schneider, 'Simultan und Erzählfragmente aus dem Umfeld', *Bachmann Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Götsche (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2002), pp.159-71 (p. 161).

<sup>43</sup> Bachmann, *Werke*, II, p. 290.

<sup>44</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Word for Word', in *Three Paths to the Lake*, trans. by Mary Fran Gilbert (New York and London, 1989), pp. 1-36 (p. 8).



languages beyond the speaker's conscious control.<sup>45</sup> Later in the story, the portrayal of Nadja as a machinic extension of the technological apparatus in the interpreting booth is taken even further:

Sie rieb sich beide Ohren, wo sonst ihre Kopfhörer anlagen, ihre Schaltungen automatisch funktionierten und die Sprachbrüche stattfanden. Was für ein seltsamer Mechanismus war sie doch, ohne einen einzigen Gedanken im Kopf zu haben, lebte sie, eingetaucht in die Sätze anderer, und mußte nachtwanderisch mit gleichen, aber anderslautenden Sätzen sofort nachkommen.<sup>46</sup>

[She [...] rubbed her ears at the spot where she usually wore her headphones, where the switches were thrown automatically and the language circuits were broken. What a strange mechanism she was, she lived without a single thought of her own, immersed in the sentences of others, like a sleepwalker, furnishing the same but different-sounding sentences an instant later.]<sup>47</sup>

In Röggl's twenty-first century portrayal of the simultaneous interpreter, the dismantling of the subject that begins in Bachmann's 'Simultan' can be seen to find radical realization in the machinic voices that dominate the dramatic action. The psychological portrait of Nadja in Bachmann's immersive narrative gives way to figures in transit – part-human, part-machine – who never quite emerge as individuated subjects, yet consistently disrupt the assemblage that simultaneously threatens to consume them. By calling up the ghosts of Ingeborg Bachmann and her famous protagonist, the uncanny achievement of Röggl's text is to lay bare the non-physical machinery of neo-liberal power networks no longer visible in our contemporary world. In her radical treatment of the voice of the interpreter, Röggl exposes the inherent contradiction in the neoliberal machine's colonization of the human voice, which must be exploited as the basis for the machine's power but which – in its disruptive status as the

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<sup>45</sup> Giulia Radaelli, *Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit. Sprachwechsel bei Elias Canetti und Ingeborg Bachmann* (Berlin, 2011), p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> Bachmann, *Werke*, II, p. 295.

<sup>47</sup> Bachmann, 'Word for Word', p. 13.

ultimate threshold phenomenon – is also that which can never can be coopted entirely. In capturing this quandary, *die unvermeidlichen* can thus be seen as an early manifestation of what Rögglä went on to outline in her second Zurich lecture as a text in transit between the documentary and the fictional, the oral and the written, able to reveal a dilemma in its manifold entanglements.

Draft notes made by Bachmann for the first edition of *Simultan* illuminate the wider ethico-political significance of Rögglä's decision to place the simultaneous interpreter at the centre of her text: 'Darum nenne ich den Band „Simultan“, denn was stattfindet, ist ein simultanes Geschehen und Denken und Fühlen, und Sprachen, die sich nie ganz begegnen, jeder muß den andren ein wenig übersetzen. Übersetzen ist die erste Pflicht, auch wenn sie nicht in [die] Charta der Menschenrechte aufgenommen ist' [That's why I called the volume 'Simultan' because what takes place happens simultaneously, thinking and feeling, and languages that never quite coincide, we all have to translate for one another, to some extent. Translation is our first duty, even if it is not included in the charter of human rights].<sup>48</sup> This ethical imperative is helpful for conceptualizing Rögglä's political preoccupation with the simultaneous interpreter in *die unvermeidlichen*, as the text gives striking interpretation to the conception of translation as mediation not only between different people and languages but between unseen and potentially contradictory realms of experience. Recent work on technologies of humanitarianism in the globalized twenty-first century serves to elucidate the contemporary relevance of Rögglä's conflicted interpreters as machinic assemblage. In the past decade, scholars have become increasingly concerned with the biopoliticization of humanitarian relief during the 1990s and its implications for humanitarian agencies implicated

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<sup>48</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, "*Todesarten*"-Projekt. *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche, 4 vols (Munich, 1995), IV, p. 17.

in the complex emergencies and war zones of the present.<sup>49</sup> Eyal Weizman, Director of the Turner Prize-nominated research agency Forensic Architecture,<sup>50</sup> has taken up Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir's term 'moral technologies' in his own account of a humanitarian 'lesser evil' used to justify Western military exploits and to calculate permissible levels of collateral damage in conflict.<sup>51</sup> According to Weizman, Ophir's term denotes a complex assemblage of 'spatial organizations and physical instruments, technical standards, procedures and systems of monitoring [...] for exercising contemporary violence and for governing the displaced, the enemy and the unwanted.'<sup>52</sup> Read against this critical framework, an ethical resolve to engage with the machine's creative potential in order to challenge its violent collusion with neo-liberal systems of governance can be identified driving Rögglä's project. Her theatre text moves beyond conventional first-person modes of witnessing to develop instead forms of testimony able to engage with entangled aspects of experience and diffuse

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live* (London and New York, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Weizman set up Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths University of London, to develop methods of charting these technologies and their violations of international humanitarian law. In 2018, the agency made the Turner Prize short-list in recognition of its investigative work 'sourcing and visualizing evidence relating to human rights abuses around the world, used in courts of law, as well as exhibitions of art and architecture.' See

<<http://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/turner-prize-2018-shortlist-announced>>

[accessed 14 August 2018].

<sup>51</sup> Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: A Short History of Humanitarian Violence* (London 2011), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

power structures at the threshold of detectability. To follow Ingeborg Bachmann, the artistic resolve to engage with transit spaces, mediating between conflicting simultaneities, might be understood as a form of translation in its widest sense, acknowledging an ethical duty to devise textual forms that account for the machinic constitution of experience in the twenty-first century. In so doing, the project develops new sites of interpretation and contestation that challenge universalizing notions of human rights and, instead, confronts unseen forms of violence and conflict to call for a transformative politics that at once intervenes in the real and imagines alternative worlds beyond it.